

*The Various Haunts of Men (Susan Hill)*

Reader's Guide Discussion Questions

1. Hill does a very good job of portraying Aidan as a normal colleague of the other doctors in the story – when did you begin to suspect his role in the killings? How were you able to piece things together? Did you suspect a different character at any point?
2. There are many strong women characters with powerful professions playing essential roles in the novel. Discuss Cat Deerbon and Freya Graffham. In addition, other women in the novel display their strength in other ways. Who are these women and what do they fight against? Consider Karin McCafferty, Inis Chater, Carol Ashton, Sandy Marsh and Meriel Serrailer.
3. Even though Aidan Sharpe rejected Angela Randall's affection, she continued to buy her future kidnapper and killer expensive gifts. Why do you think she became so attached to Aidan, despite his coldness?
4. Many characters have connections with Simon Serrailer, but his actions have little sway in the events of the book. Both Cat Deerbon (his sister) and Sharon Medcalf warn Freya Graffham about falling for Simon. Discuss his relationship with Freya and with his family.
5. Aidan defends himself and his work to Freya in their final confrontation, claiming "those I kill die to benefit mankind" (406). He compares himself to others who "are the simply mad of course...those who have no motive, nor very much knowledge of what they do. If they have a reason for what they do it is usually a deranged, distorted one, a product of madness" (406). Discuss Aidan Sharpe's twisted rationale for killing four people and a dog, as well as his own differentiation between himself and the "simply mad." What exactly was he doing with their bodies? Would his work really benefit the science world in any significant way? Why or why not?
6. What mistakes does Aidan make that eventually lead to his demise?
7. Aidan spends some quality time with his victim's bodies before he hangs himself in the woods; look back at this passage (p. 426) and discuss his mental state. What incidents in his childhood could have shaped him to be this way?
8. Consider Freya's relationship with her subordinate officer, Nathan Coates. What aspects of their personalities allow them to work so well together? Why does Freya insist on Nathan proposing to his girlfriend Emily as soon as possible?

9. Compare Freya's drink date with Aidan (p. 370) with their later meeting in her house (p.400). How does Aidan's temperament and persona change between the two occasions? What does this reveal about his state-of-mind?
10. The media plays a large role not only to inform the public about the police's work, but also to skew information in a marketable way. Did the radio announcements the police sent out help their investigation at all? What about Rachel Carr's newspaper articles; consider her first article on Debbie Parker (p. 228) and her second on Dava (p. 308).
11. Why do you think Hill chooses to alternate between regular narrative and sections that allow readers to enter into the killer's mind? What do these insights add to the overall story? How does this structure affect your reading experience?
12. Aidan nicknames his victims from Greek mythology. What do these names signify, if anything? (see page 246)
13. Throughout the novel, the characters discuss the benefits and dangers of various types of alternative medicine. For example, Cat Deerbon, while a certified physician, recognizes the merits of certain types of alternative practices – such as acupuncture and osteopathy. On the other hand, Karin McCafferty and Debbie Parker try more suspect forms of alternative care to help her cancer. Compare the characters who offered some type of alternative help – Dava, spiritual healer (Colin Davison); Dr. Groatman, psychic surgeon (Anthony Orford); and Sheila Innis, medium. Did these people succeed in helping their patients?
14. In the end, we realize that Aidan Sharpe is the speaker in the chapters addressed to an unknown person. Are there any hints that you see in retrospect leading towards Aidan Sharpe as the killer? Look particularly at the first section (p. 1) and the scene when Aunt Elsie brings him to the execution (p. 51). Discuss to whom these chapters may be addressed.